CHARTER WOOD MANAGEMENT PLAN 2013 – 2016

1. Background and description

1.1 Charter Wood is 10 hectares of mixed broadleaved plantation woodland situated between the Avenue of Remembrance and Braiswick in Castle Ward. It is adjacent to the Council's Cymbeline Meadows agricultural holding and is surrounded by grazing pastures and arable fields. The wood is criss-crossed by a network of paths, including a public right of way and woodland walks.

1.2 Approximately 8ha (10,000 trees) was planted in 1990 (compartment 1 and 3, map 2) and 2ha (3000 trees) in 1995 (compartment 2, map 2). Trees were donated by local people and businesses to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the granting of Colchester's Charter. Public planting events were held and the project was grant-aid funded by the then Forest Authority.

1.3 Charter Wood is owned freehold by the Council and is looked after by Parks and Recreation within Life Opportunities. In recent years the general amenity of the woodland has been improved in line with the main management recommendations set out in the Cymbeline Meadows Management Plan (2006). This has included improvements to public access, limited tree work and the removal of tree guards.

1.4 Following a recent review of Charter Wood's tree stock it was confirmed that establishment of the trees had been successful. They now form a significant landscape feature on the approach into Colchester. However, the trees - like those in all young plantations - are even-aged and homogenous resulting in a woodland that lacks visual variety. In addition, the closely planted trees prevent the establishment of tree seedlings and shrubs, and suppress ground flora, below the canopy. To achieve the full benefits of the woodland for local people, landscape and wildlife, and to ensure the long term health of the trees, it will be necessary to undertake new management works. These works are explained in the proposals set in section 4. below.

2. Tree species list

Sweet chestnut*
Cherry*- possibly of ornamental origin.
Grey alder*
Ash
Birch – most self-sown at the time of planting.
Sallow – often with a vigorous coppice growth form which has developed after the already established sallow were cut back when the plantation was initially created.
Lime
Field maple
Oak
Hornbeam

*non-native species.

Other species mentioned in the Charter Wood Register – Walnut and Rowan - but no specimens were found in the woodland. Hawthorn and blackthorn scrub is found on all boundaries of the wood.

3. Main management aims

- Improve the health of the trees
- Improve public access and amenity
- Create structural diversity in the woodland
- Increase the understory of the woodland
- Improve the wildlife habitat

4. Management proposals and rationale

4.1 Thinning

It is proposed to thin 30% of the woodland over three years, compartment 1b winter 2013/14, compartment 1a winter 2014/15, compartment 2 winter 2015/16 (see map 2). A Felling Licence has been obtained from the Forestry Commission for the work should the proposal be approved.

Reasons

In plantations trees are planted closer together than they would be in the mature woodland which develops in the future. Initially they all shoot upwards together as there is a competitive struggle for light. Thin trees reach the light in the upper canopy but they cannot support themselves – they are some times referred to as “whips” –and they are always being blown against their neighbours abraising their leaves and twigs. Whips are less vigorous trees and should be removed at intervals in thinning to provide more light and growing space for selected trees which consequently grow faster, develop larger crowns and become dominant, healthy trees. Where a plantation has not been thinned sufficiently all the trees may grow tall and thin and they become prone to windblow. They do not develop good sized crowns and sturdy trunks and they are weaker and more susceptible to diseases. From an amenity point of view they are less attractive. Most of the trees in Charter Wood have been planted in small groups of one species. A group for 5 to 7 specimens of one species may abut on 3 or 4 groups of different species. Each group requires thinning.

Selective thinning round some specimen trees. A 30% thin equates to every third tree being felled but it can not be carried out as simply as that. For example in Charter Wood often the hornbeam is being out-competed by self sown, faster growing birch. As hornbeam is slower growing than the other planted trees it is more likely to be “smothered” by its immediate neighbours, the trees are suffering as a result. Of the hornbeam the best examples need to be marked up and identified and the surrounding competing trees thinned out rather than every third tree in a planted line. The healthier stronger specimen trees should be favoured through out the woodland in all species.

4.2 Glade improvement

It is proposed to increase in the size of the woodland glades by coppicing trees on the glade edges (see map 1). Coppice approximately 50 trees per glade over three years, glades 5 and 6 winter 2013/14, glades 7 and 8 winter 2014/15, glade 4 winter 2015/16. Re-coppice inner ring of trees every 4 years and the outer ring every 8 (see diagram1).

Reasons

To create a diverse age and height structure within the trees to allow more light into the glade areas for landscape and wildlife. It will also allow the glades and adjacent paths to dry quicker thus leading to less muddy paths so improving public access.

4.3 Sweet Chestnut

It is proposed to create an area of sweet chestnut coppice, compartment 3, winter 2013/14 (see map 2). Coppice every 20 years.

Reason

To create structural diversity in the woodland and produce a sustainable crop e.g. used for fire wood.

4.4 Tree guards

It is proposed to continue removing and disposing of the tree guards where they still remain. Create small mammal refuges out of some of the old tubular corrugated plastic tree guards.

Reasons

Tree guards are unsightly litter. When removing the guards evidence was found, in the form of stashes of fruit and berry stones, that small mammals make good use of them

4.5 Wildlife improvements

It is proposed to leave standing dead wood where safe to do so. Leave 5% brash as habitat piles. Create at least 4 log pile habitats in each of the compartments 1a, 1b and 2. Leave 4 to 5 whole trees felled lying on the ground in each of the compartments 1a, 1b and 2.

Reason

Dead wood habitats are an important wildlife resource for many species especially small mammals, insects and birds.

4.6 Monitoring

It is proposal to monitor possible browsing of new coppice by deer. Stools will be protected with either brash or with temporary fencing if required.

Reason

Deer can kill or cause significant damage to the regrowth.

4.7 Costs

It is proposed that contractors will take the timber and cordwood in payment for their work.

Reason

To defray the costs of the work to the Council.

4.8 Arisings

It is proposed that the arisings/brash is chipped by the contractor. Chip to be taken to the High Woods Country Park Big Garden project. A couple of small chip piles can be left in each of the compartments 1a, 1b and 2 as habitat piles. Burning of arisings may be permitted in a few selected fire site locations (locations yet to be decided, depends on their necessity once work commences).

Reason

In compliance with Countryside Team's Controlled Burning Risk Assessment and Environmental Policy. A zero carbon option.

4.9 Grounds and Estates Maintenance Works

It is proposed to continue with the cyclical grounds and estates maintenance works. This includes cutting the vegetation overhanging and on the surface of the paths; maintaining seating and the boardwalk, visitor information and boundary fences.

Reason

Public amenity.

4.10 Marketing

If the management proposals are approved then a press release - describing the success of Charter Wood and the new management proposals - will be prepared. On site posters and a press release will invite interested members of the public on a ranger led walk with the aim to explain in more detail the new management.

Acknowledgements

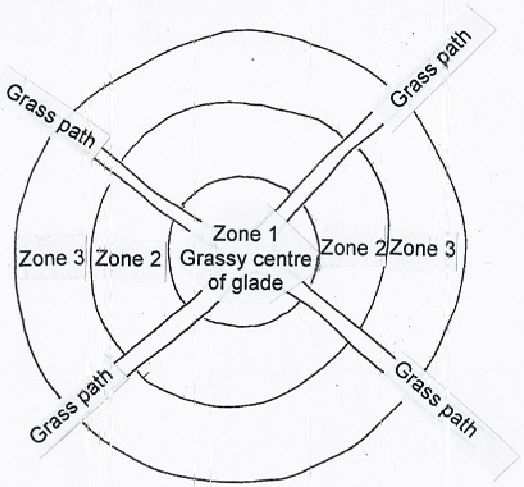
Thanks to:
Peter Wilson, Paul Vickers and the Forestry Commission

Ref:
Woodland Rides and Glades: their management for wildlife. JNCC
Coppiced Woodlands: their management for wildlife. NCC
Woodland Management for Butterflies and Moths. Butterfly Conservation
The Conservation of Lower Plants in Woodland. JNCC
Woodlands a Practical Handbook. BTCV

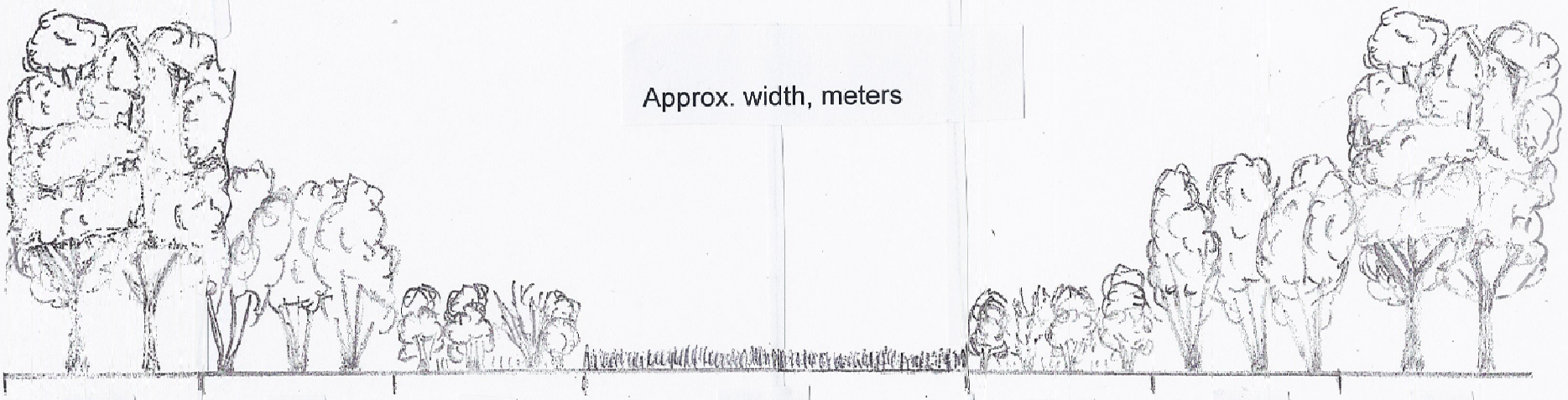
Diagram 1

Glade Management

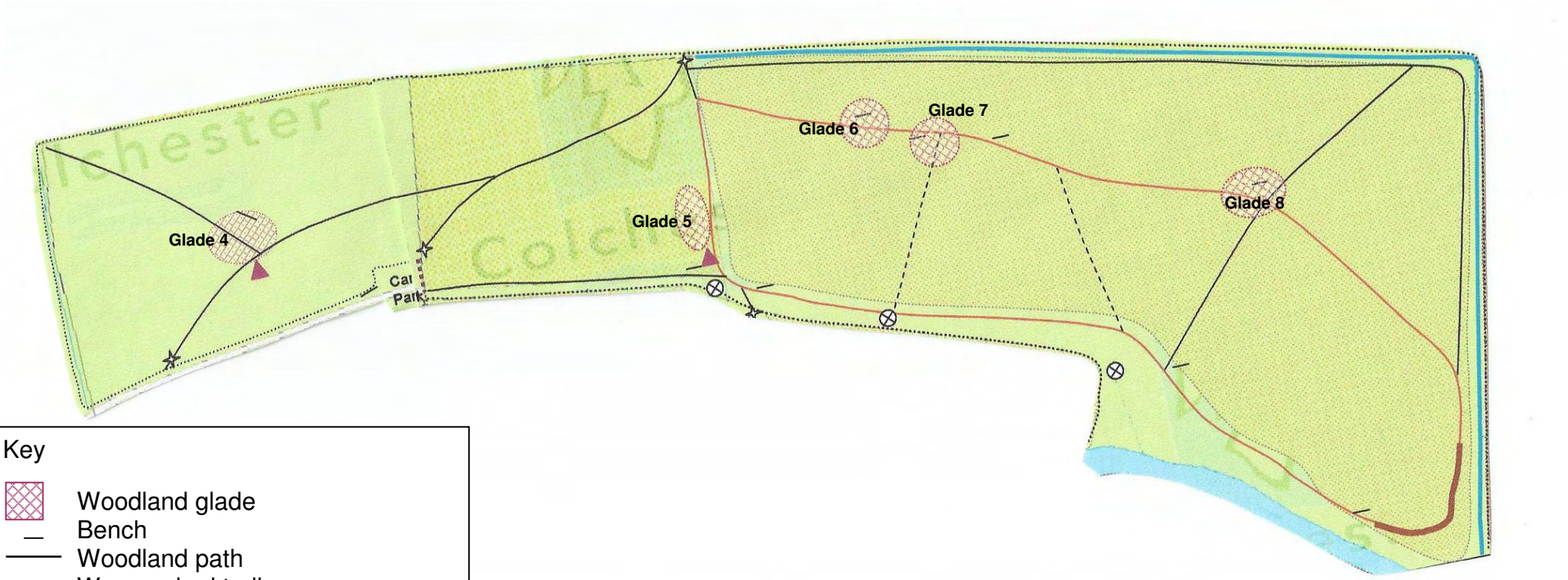
Birds eye view of a glade
Glade on a four way path junction



Cross Section of a glade



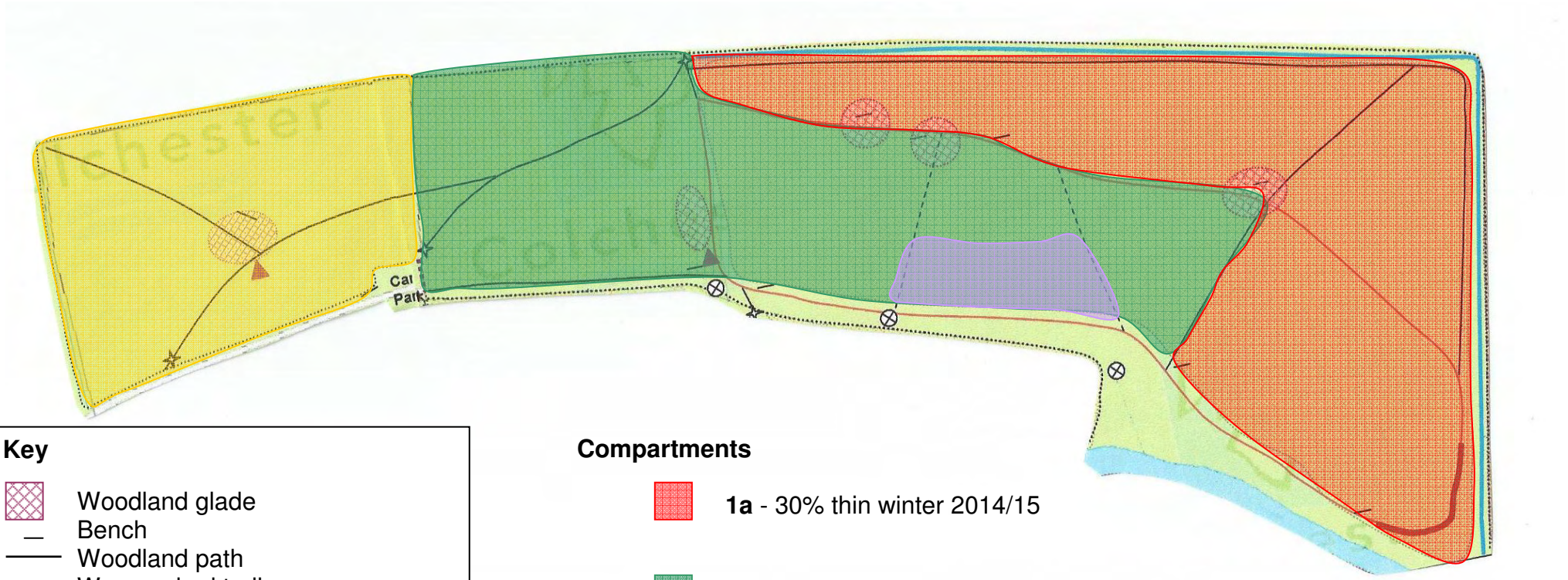
Charter Wood Management Plan Map 1



Key

- Woodland glade
- Bench
- Woodland path
- Way marked trail
- Board walk
- Fence line
- Kissing gate
- River Colne
- Habitat log pile
- Large drain cover

Charter Wood Management Plan Map 2



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Compartments

- **1a** - 30% thin winter 2014/15
- **1b** - 30% thin winter 2013/14
- **2** - 30% thin winter 2015/16
- **3** - Sweet chestnut coppice winter 2013/14